

Named for Rutland Resident Britney Gengel, Who Lost Her Life in 2010 Earthquake in Haiti.



Leonard "Len" and Cherylann Gengel of Rutland, Mass., lost their daughter Britney four years ago in a massive earthquake that hit Haiti. Vowing that her death would not be in vain, the couple—along with sons Bernie and Richie—have kept alive Britney’s dream to help the poor island nation’s children.

Britney was a 19-year-old sophomore at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Fla., who had traveled to Haiti to do mission work with the organization Food for the Poor. She died when the hotel where she was staying collapsed during the 2010 7.0-magnitude earthquake, which killed over 300,000 people and displaced a million others. Wanting to establish a memorial to their daughter’s legacy, the Gengels started the [Be Like Brit Foundation](#), wrote a book about their daughter, and raised money to build the \$2 million, earthquake-proof Be Like Brit Orphanage in Grand Coave, Haiti. The 19,000-square-foot facility, which opened in January 2013 and is shaped in the letter “B,” houses 45 children. It’s expected that up to 66 children will live there by the end of 2014.

Knowing they needed a plan to sustain the foundation and orphanage's future and to take their fund-raising strategy to the next level, the Gengel family recently sought the expertise of [Assumption College's Master of Business Administration \(MBA\) program](#)

. Throughout spring 2014, six graduate students—

**Monica Castillo, Kyle Dedeian, Mark DiPierro, Dea Qiqi, Joseph Rogers**

and

**Andrea Tobin**

—applied management skills learned in the classroom to draft a comprehensive strategy that identified key issues facing the foundation and provided recommendations for sustaining it.

The students recommended that the board of directors expand to include an accounting or legal advisor with nonprofit and financial management experience to demonstrate to donors a commitment to safeguarding the organization's nonprofit status; a business owner with experience starting and growing a foundation; a principal in the media or events business to serve as an advisor for donor growth; and an educator to provide guidance for programs and development. The group also recommended that the board seek additional funding opportunities and track the short and long-term progress of the children leaving the orphanage.

The project was advised by [Eric Drouart](#), a visiting assistant professor in Assumption's MBA Program, and was conducted for his MBA Business Strategy Capstone course.

"This project is exactly the type of real-world, experiential projects conducted by Assumption College MBA students," he said. "Since it involved a charitable organization founded by a local family, students were engaged and motivated knowing that their strategic recommendations would contribute to its long-term sustainability. This project also directly supports the mission of Assumption and was, possibly, the most significant MBA capstone project I have been involved with here."

The Gengels agreed to implement the students' recommendations.

"We are very appreciative of the Assumption College graduate students for their strategic plan for Be Like Brit and look forward to implementing their recommendations," said Len Gengel. "The foundation is dedicated to raising the next generation of leaders in Haiti; the Assumption students' recommendations will help us achieve this goal. We are grateful to them for their help."

One of the students, Andrea Tobin of Maynard, Mass., noted how the skills she learned through Assumption's MBA program gave her the framework to help build the strategic plan, helping her develop a marketing analysis for the foundation and determine financially sound recommendations future growth.

"Working with the Gengel family to help Be Like Brit was definitely the most beneficial project that I had done in my MBA career," said Tobin, who received her degree (accounting and finance/economics concentrations) at Assumption's May 17 Commencement. "I got hands-on experience working with a nonprofit organization. Knowing that the Gengels were actually going to use our proposals, also made working on the project that much better. I believe that the Gengels are truly doing a great thing by helping the children of Haiti, carrying on Britney's dream, and building the future of Haiti."

Monica Castillo of Sutton, Mass., also earned her MBA in May, concentrating in human resources and management.

"Being able to use the skills I have acquired from my Assumption MBA courses to apply to a real business situation was a great experience," she said. "I will apply all that I have learned from Assumption to my career. I am proud that Assumption prepared my classmates and me to work with the Gengel family to better their organization."